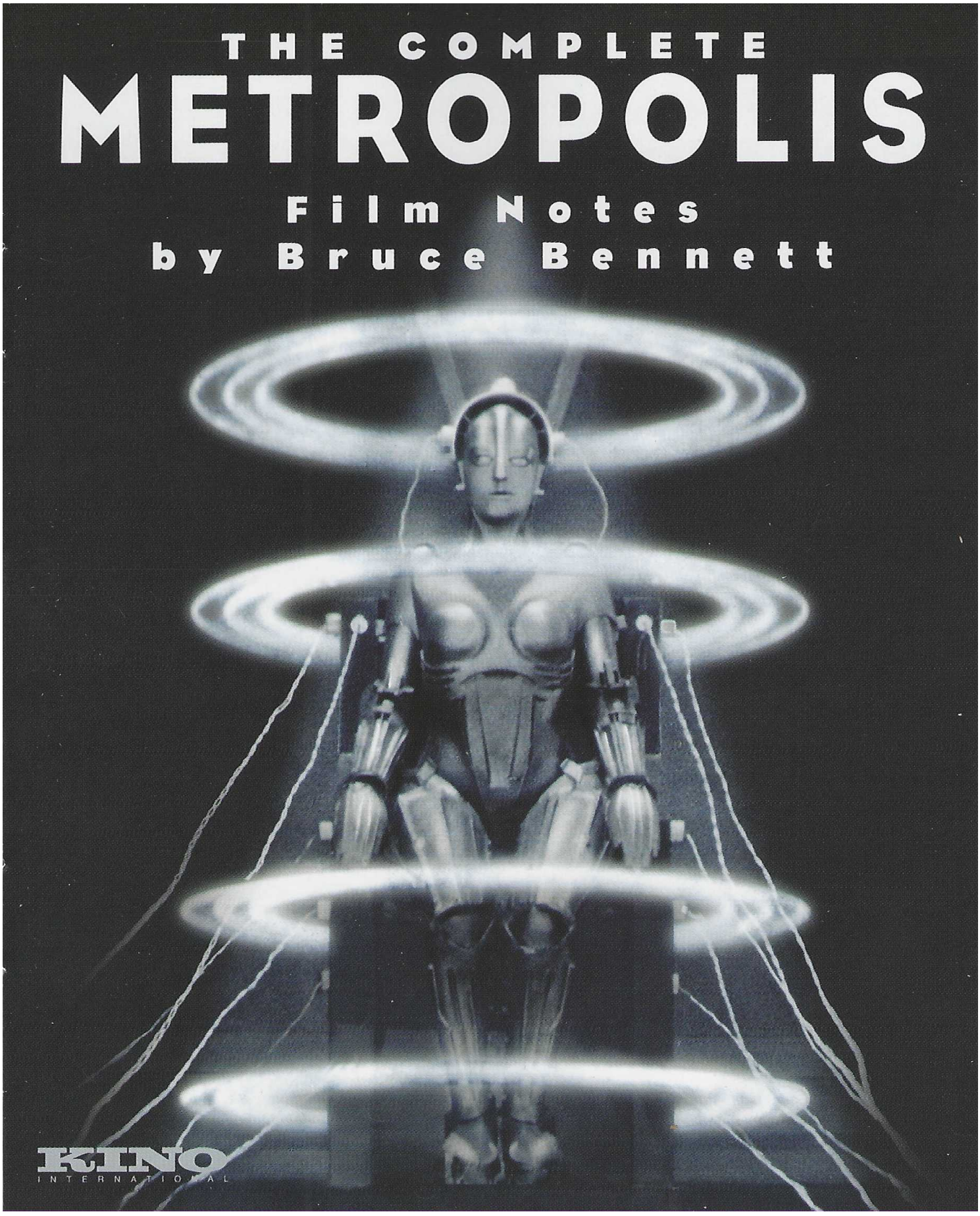
THE COMPLETE METROPOLIS

Film Notes by Bruce Bennett



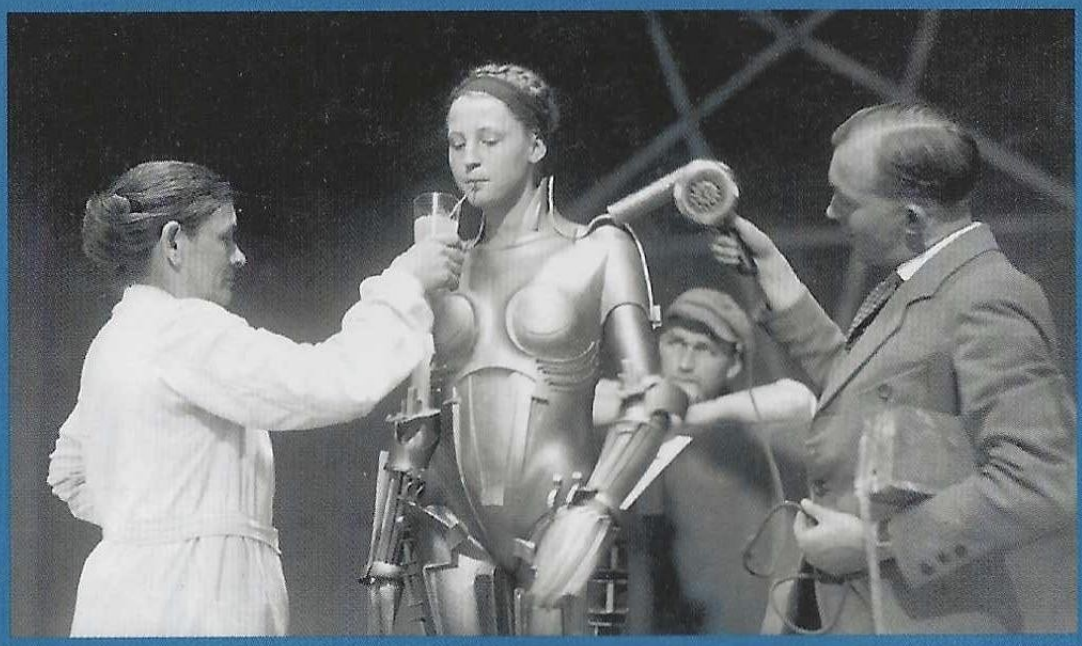
KINO INTERNATIONAL

Making Metropolis

In 1924, Ufa Studios' star filmmaking team—producer Erich Pommer and director Fritz Lang—arrived in New York to attend the gala U.S. premiere of their new two-part spectacle *Die Nibelungen.* For the rest of his life, Fritz Lang maintained that, as he told Peter Bogdanovich, his first view of the city from New York Harbor heralded a defining creative moment. "I looked into the streets, the glaring lights and the tall buildings, and there I conceived *Metropolis.*"

But Lang and his co-writer and wife Thea Von Harbou had actually been at work on the scenario of *Metropolis* for more than a year prior to the New York arrival. A subsequent whirlwind VIP tour of several Hollywood film studios may ultimately have influenced *Metropolis* more. Humbled by the technical superiority and vertical integration of the Hollywood studios, Lang and Pommer realized that their next picture would have to be of a size and scope that could rival the craftsmanship and spectacle that had become synonymous with the American film industry.

By 1924, the expansion that Germany's Universum Film AG (Ufa) had enjoyed for the prior half-decade had stalled due to rampant inflation in Weimar Germany and a fitful cash flow. The high esteem Ufa was held in worldwide as the home studio of an influential German style in cinema (often described with the catch-all term "Expressionism") did little to offset Ufa's growing debt. Nevertheless, Lang declared his intention to make *Metropolis* " the costliest and most ambitious picture ever." Total investment in Lang's "super production" was justified in the minds of the Ufa board of directors, who believed a German-made blockbuster of Hollywood proportions would likely prove irresistible to US distributors.



Brigitte Helm cools off between takes.

"Mrs. Von Harbou and I," Lang recalled decades later to Bogdanovich, "put in the script to *Metropolis* a battle between modern science and occultism, the science of the middle ages." Fresh from the triumph of the *Nibelungen* films, Lang and production designers Otto Hunte and Erich Kettelhut set about designing a modernist cityscape that encompassed the full range of '20s architectural and industrial futurism, as well as settings like the Tower of Babel, shadowy subterranean catacombs, and the cathedral roof Rotwang climbs like Victor Hugo's Hunchback, that were steeped in brooding medieval religiosity. The *Metropolis* script called for meticulous miniature photography along with full-scale floods, explosions and riots that demanded a new level of collaborative ingenuity and resourcefulness from every production department. Studio literature bragged that over 36,000 extras were used for the live action flood, the workers' riots and the Tower of Babel scenes created on Ufa's recently completed and massive Neubabelsberg lot.

Managed more along the lines of a European builder's guild rather than a factory like its Hollywood counterparts, Ufa hired many key craftsmen by the job rather than as permanent staff. As *Metropolis*'s cameras rolled over 310 shooting days and 60 nights, the financially shaky studio's overhead costs skyrocketed. Lang's excesses were threatening to bankrupt the studio before they could deliver *Metropolis* to their new American partner Paramount. After 17 months of shooting, Lang completed the film to his and Ufa's anxious satisfaction at a cost, according to the studio, of 4.9 million marks—three and a half times the film's original projected budget. The Ufa brass had already fired Erich Pommer mid-production.

Unmaking Metropolis

Metropolis officially premiered in Lang's original 153 minute (at 24 frames per second) length, on January 19th, 1927 at Ufa's flagship theater, the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin. When the studio's new bottom line-conscious partners at Paramount were shown Lang's finished version of the film a month later, Paramount execs demanded extensive cuts for the film's scheduled American release. Ufa pulled *Metropolis* from theaters and the work began on paring Lang's cut down from fourteen reels to seven. Paramount hired playwright Channing Pollock to oversee the film's re-titling and re-editing. Declaring the film in its original form, "symbolism run such riot that people who saw it couldn't tell what the picture was all about," Pollock told reporters, "I have given it my meaning."

Shorn of nearly an hour of running time, this new abrupt and less coherent *Metropolis* premiered in the US in March of 1927, and shortly thereafter in England in a slightly altered version. Lang bitterly remarked to British journalists, "I love films so I shall never go to America. Their experts have slashed my best film, *Metropolis*, so cruelly that I dare not see it while I am in England." Though the film was relatively well reviewed in the US ("it is a weird and fascinating picture," opined the *New York Herald Tribune*), *Metropolis* was quickly forgotten when *The Jazz Singer* ushered in the talking picture era later the same year.

Theodor Loos and Gustav Fröhlich in the heavily-edited flooding sequence.

While shooting *Metropolis*, Lang and director of photography Karl Freund followed the common practice at the time of securing three printable takes of each shot so that three separate camera negatives could be edited and assembled for striking prints. Of the three completed source negatives, one was bowdlerized by Paramount and the similar British abridgement claimed another. Tragically, Ufa cut the sole remaining original long-edit negative late in 1927 along the lines of Pollock's version. Ironically, when the studio resubmitted the abbreviated cut to German censors, the same bureaucrats that had passed Lang's cut now demanded and received small excisions and changes. Due to the acquisition of a copy in the thirties by The Museum of Modern Art's film archive (re-copied and repatriated back to Germany in 1986), it is this version that has proliferated in the 75 years since *Metropolis*'s premiere.

Restoring Metropolis

In the decades since *Metropolis* was mauled by Paramount's decree, variant copies and versions of Lang's masterpiece have changed hands, been preserved or were discovered through the efforts of film archives all over the world. No one print represented Lang's vision as seen on *Metropolis*'s opening night, and for a few short weeks in Berlin and Nuremberg thereafter. Between 1968 and 1972, the East German Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR compiled a version of the film with the help of other world archives that included footage from multiple sources. Alas, many riddles of the film's abridged narrative structure could not be solved due to a lack of additional film footage and an original script to guide the assembly.

In 1982, pop music impresario Giorgio Moroder, impressed by the success of Zoetrope and Kevin Brownlow's restoration of Abel Gance's *Napoleon* and acting, he said, on the suggestion of "someone at Paramount that I do something with a silent movie," outbid David Bowie for the rights to fashion his own version of *Metropolis* from existing materials. Utilizing a variety of sources, Moroder's tinted, sub-titled, and re-edited version somewhat clarified the film's truncated narrative. Though it was made in consultation with the Munich Film Archive (who received a new copy of the un-Morodered MoMA print in exchange for their efforts), and *Metropolis*'s tireless would-be savior there, respected German film archivist Enno Patalas, Moroder's *Metropolis* was roundly criticized by some as yet another desecration of an already much maligned classic. Moroder shrugged off such accusations, telling *The New York Times*, "I didn't touch the original because there is no original." A modest theatrical success and home video hit, Moroder's version of Lang's film introduced a new generation to *Metropolis*'s unforgettable imagery and brought attention to Enno Patalas and the Munich Film Archive's ongoing restoration efforts.

In 1987, Patalas took advantage of a series of unusual acquisitions to assemble and unveil a third version of *Metropolis*. This new version made extensive use of materials acquired from the estate of *Metropolis*'s original score composer Gottfried Huppertz. The Munich Archive group used recently discovered censorship cards (required copies of all the original intertitles kept by German censors in the '20s) from the premiere version, and newly acquired stills that documented some of the lost scenes to close previously unexplainable narrative gaps. From 1998 to 2001, film preservationist Martin Koerber led a team of experts who meticulously compiled and assembled a "definitive" restoration, commissioned by the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung, based on the 1987 Munich Archive version. Using a nitrate original camera negative found at the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv and original nitrate prints from the British Film Institute, the George Eastman House, and the Fondazione Cineteca Italiana, this new *Metropolis* was created directly from original film elements. New digital technology was used to "clean" every frame of the film. A handful of recovered shots were added, along with newly translated English subtitles, newly written intertitles that detailed still-missing scenes and a re-recording of Gottfried Huppertz's original score (licensed from its copyright owner Berndt Heller) by a sixty-five piece orchestra. At 124 minutes, this version was 3,640 feet longer than Moroder's and 1,320 feet longer than the "Munich" restoration.

This new restoration premiered on February 15, 2001 at the Berlin Film Festival in the Berlinale-Palast, accompanied by the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin performing a new score by Bernd Schultheis. Released theatrically in a print that featured the Huppertz score, what was then the most complete *Metropolis* to date was an enormous global success. Along with the wildly popular DVD, it introduced a redefined *Metropolis* for a new generation of admirers and confirmed the supremacy of Lang's vision to those who had grown up on the Moroder or the various truncated public domain versions of the film.

A fascination the film held for one admirer more than a half-century earlier led to what in 2001 still seemed

Before and after:
samples of damaged frames
that have been digitally restored.

borderline impossible: a nearly complete restoration of *Metropolis* to its almost entire premiere length. In Berlin on business at the time of the uncut *Metropolis* premiere and brief theatrical run in 1927, an Argentine film distributor secured a 35mm copy of Lang's original cut in advance of arranging to distribute *Metropolis* in South America. Sometime in the '60s or '70s, that 35mm positive was used to make a 16mm safety reduction negative before the original's chemically volatile and potentially flammable nitrate film stock was destroyed. This 16mm dupe negative wound up shelved alongside hundreds of other titles in a private film archive, the contents of which were absorbed by Argentina's Museo Del Cine in the years after the collector's death. Rumors of a complete *Metropolis* persisted within Argentina's film preservation community until archivist Fernando Pena and the Museo Del Cine's new head Paula Felix-Didier finally cleared administrative red tape and located a stack of cans containing the 16mm copy in the summer of 2008. This dupe negative was indeed almost the entire film as Fritz Lang made it, and as Ufa all too briefly showed it in 1927, containing 25 minutes of footage that had gone unseen since its Berlin debut, representing about a fifth of the film.

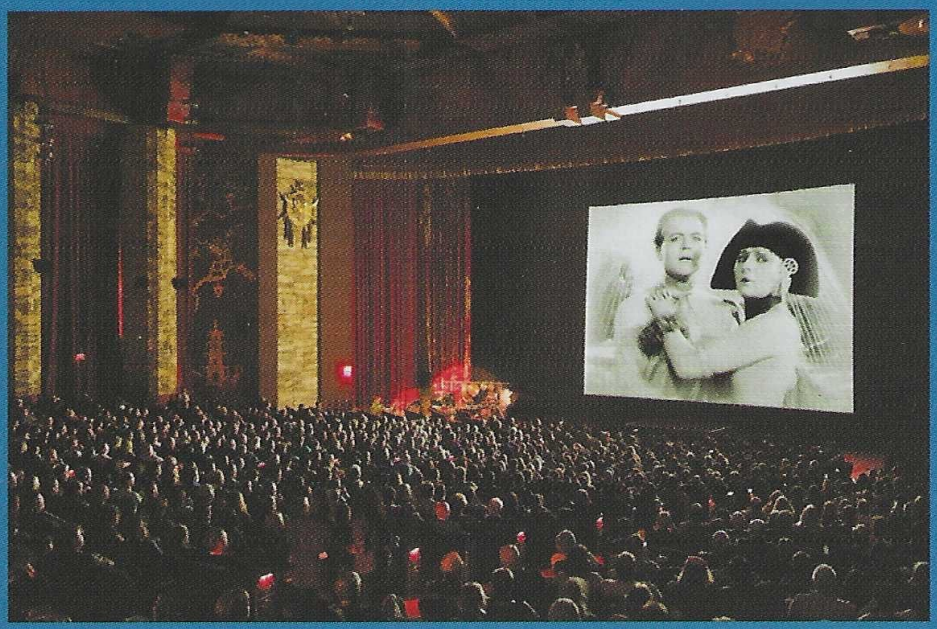
Anke Wilkening, Martin Koerber, and Frank Strobel headed a team of specialists from the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung, the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, and the Museo del Cine in Buenos Aires tasked with combining the 2001 digital reconstruction with the newly discovered material from Argentina. The condition of the 16mm dupe negative posed a major technical challenge, as the image was streaked with scratches and plagued by flickering brightness. Fortunately, advances in digital technology allowed the team to at least diminish some of the printed-in wear. "If we…had the Argentinean material for the 2001 restoration, it would have hardly been possible to work on the severe damage," Wilkening says.

As with the prior restoration, the acquisition of Gottfried Huppertz's actual 1927 musical score folio from the premiere performance of the film provided the key to accurately putting the pieces of *Metropolis* back together again. With the original script and any editing or continuity notes from the production all long gone, Huppertz's score remains the sole surviving document confirming the timing and placement of shots and scenes. Huppertz's handwritten notes on the score itself became vital narrative cues, confirming the complete Argentine negative's blueprint.

Unlike prior discoveries of missing scenes and intertitles, the nearly complete Buenos Aires negative provided a definitive roadmap for the actual original shot by shot cutting of *Metropolis* for the first time since it was re-edited by Paramount in 1927. As a result, the existing order of scenes and individual shots in much of the 2010 version were changed. As Wilkening notes, "parallel editing now becomes a major player in *Metropolis*." The return of the film's original editing tempos and juxtapositions of scenes reveal *Metropolis* to be even more of a filmmaking achievement than it was previously believed.

On the snowy night of February 12, 2010, a gala audience filled the 1,600 seat Friedrichstadt-Palast in Berlin, while more than 2,000 chilly people gathered outside beneath an enormous screen erected at the Brandenburg Gate. Accompanied by the 65 piece Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester performing Huppertz's original full length score (conducted by Frank Strobel), Lang's complete *Metropolis* held a live audience in thrall for the first time since 1927. Simultaneously, a screening was held at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt am Main, and the European network Arte presented a live telecast of the Brandenburg Gate performance. The opening fanfare and closing theme were greeted with thunderous applause inside and outside the theaters. The same response was heard at the North American premiere on April 25th at the TCM Classic Film Festival, at Grauman's Chinese Theatre, which confirmed the unbelievable truth: *Metropolis* was at last resurrected. Finally, after more than 80 years, Fritz Lang's futuristic vision has been restored to the level of brilliant cinematic lucidity he succeeded in all too briefly bringing to the screen a lifetime ago.

Frame enlargement from the Museo del Cine negative.



E.M. Pio Roda/TCM. Photo taken at North American premiere of the restored **Metropolis**, *at the 2010 TCM Classic Film Festival.*

Restoration Credits

A film of Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung in co-operation with ZDF and ARTE

Restoration carried out by Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung, Wiesbaden
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Performed by the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin,
an ensemble of the Rundfunk Orchester und Chöre GmbH
Conducted by Frank Strobel
Music production: Nina Goslar, Filmredaktion ZDF / ARTE;
Stefan Lang, Redaktion Deutschlandradio Kultur;
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